

# The dispersal of phytoplankton populations by enhanced turbulent mixing in a shallow coastal sea

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## Abstract

A single tidal cycle survey in a Lagrangian reference frame was conducted in autumn 2010 to evaluate the impact of short-term, episodic and enhanced turbulent mixing on large chain-forming phytoplankton. Observations of turbulence using a free-falling microstructure profiler were undertaken, along with near-simultaneous profiles with an in-line digital holographic camera at station L4 (50° 15' N 4° 13' W, depth 50 m) in the Western English Channel. Profiles from each instrument were collected hourly whilst following a drogued drifter. Results from an ADCP attached to the drifter showed pronounced vertical shear, indicating that the water column structure consisted of two layers, restricting interpretation of the Lagrangian experiment to the upper  $\sim 25$  m. Atmospheric conditions deteriorated during the mid-point of the survey, resulting in values of turbulent dissipation reaching a maximum of  $10^{-4} \text{ W kg}^{-1}$  toward the surface in the upper 10 m. Chain-forming phytoplankton  $> 200 \mu\text{m}$  were counted using the data from the holographic camera for the two periods, before and after the enhanced mixing event. As mixing increased phytoplankton underwent chain breakage, were dispersed

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by advection through their removal from the upper to lower layer and subjected to aggregation with other suspended material. Depth averaged counts of phytoplankton were reduced from a maximum of around  $2050\text{ L}^{-1}$  before the increased turbulence, to  $1070\text{ L}^{-1}$  after, with each of these mechanisms contributing to this reduction. These results demonstrate the sensitivity of phytoplankton populations to moderate increases in turbulent activity, yielding consequences for accurate forecasting of the role played by phytoplankton in climate studies and also for the ecosystem in general in their role as primary producers.

*Keywords:* Turbulence; L4; Phytoplankton dispersal; Holographic imaging; Flocculation

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## 1. Introduction

Turbulence, be it generated at the surface or by internal processes, may have a controlling influence on the movement and distribution of phytoplankton, acting to keep non-motile phytoplankton in suspension (Jumars et al., 2009). This is particularly relevant in shallow coastal seas, where the majority of energy associated with tidal activity is dissipated. Turbulence can also act against stratification to mix nutrients across density gradients, so turbulent patches within the thermocline may impact on bloom dynamics by acting as sites of enhanced primary productivity (Sharples et al., 2001; Steinbuck et al., 2009).

Investigating the impact that turbulence has on individual populations of phytoplankton is not straightforward, and would typically be conducted in laboratory microcosms. Within these idealised environments our understanding of the response of phytoplankton to turbulence has been advanced considerably, including examining the influence upon nutrient uptake (Romero et al., 2012), community composition and size (Arin et al., 2002), and the influence of varying levels of turbulence itself (Cozar and Echevarria, 2005). Similar investigations in the field are uncommon, typically due to the limi-

53 tation of an uncontrolled environment or the absence of appropriate instru-  
54 mentation to tackle the problem. Often, destructive techniques are used to  
55 sample the water column, which can readily damage phytoplankton giving  
56 misleading information on biomass or size (Gallienne and Robins, 2001).  
57 Non-destructive methods such as laser transmissometry are beginning to  
58 prove popular (Rzadkowolski and Thornton, 2012), although it is unclear  
59 how well the statistics gained from these instruments translate to the char-  
60 acteristic size and shape of phytoplankton in the marine environment.

61 Image analysis has been shown to be a useful non-destructive method  
62 for analysing phytoplankton *in situ* (Zarauz et al., 2009; Stemmann and  
63 Boss, 2012). Methods such as digital photography allow some indication of  
64 the organisms under study, though the resulting image resolution may be  
65 considered impractical for a more comprehensive analysis of particle type.  
66 The emerging technology of holographic imaging offers detailed images of  
67 suspended particles under a range of conditions, generating particle statis-  
68 tics such as size and number density without the need to disturb particles  
69 from their natural environment (Graham and Nimmo Smith, 2010; Graham  
70 et al., 2012). The work presented here utilises holographic imaging for all  
71 observations of phytoplankton.

72 The aim of this paper is to investigate the response of a phytoplankton  
73 community to short-term, enhanced turbulent mixing at station L4 in the  
74 Western English Channel. L4 may be regarded as typical of the shallow  
75 shelf system of the United Kingdom. Whilst exhibiting seasonal stratifica-  
76 tion, this site is prone to frequent bouts of increased mixing from inclement  
77 weather systems (Groom et al., 2009). As such, L4 is well suited to providing  
78 an insight into phytoplankton dynamics when exposed to differing types of  
79 physical forcing.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Survey location

Station L4 resides approximately 10 km south of Plymouth at 50° 15' N 4° 13' W where the water depth is around 50 m with a seabed predominantly consisting of sand (Figure 1). Long-term data exist for temperature and salinity at L4, along with a wealth of information on phytoplankton and zooplankton. With the proximity to the coast, and also to the outflow of freshwater from the local rivers, the L4 site forms a central part of the Western Channel Observatory (WCO). The long-term data indicates that the site is well-mixed during the winter, before the onset of thermal stratification in spring that is maintained through to the autumn months. The stratified water column has an average difference in temperature of 2°C between the upper and lower layers (Fishwick, 2008). The site is characterised by a dominant semi-diurnal tide, experiencing a maximum range of over 5 m that generates currents of 0.5-0.6 m s<sup>-1</sup> at the surface.

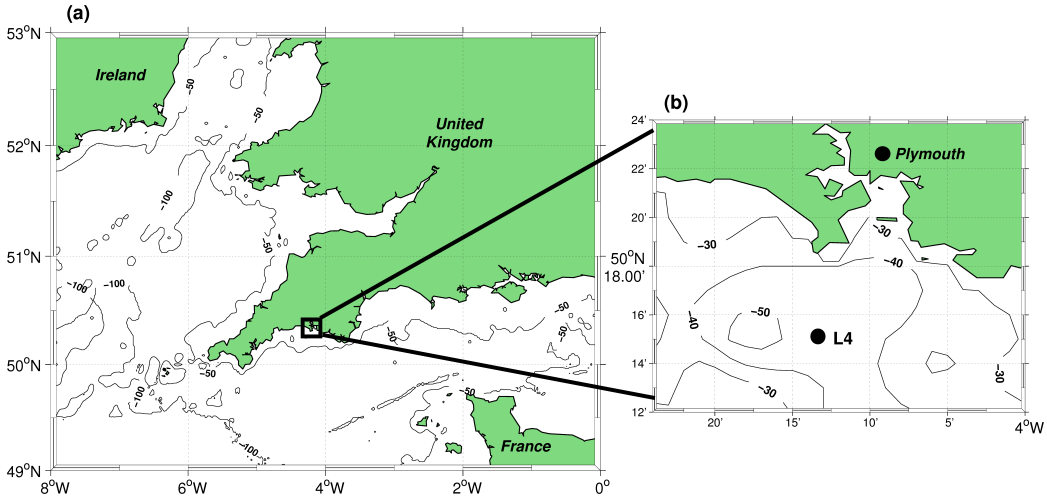


Figure 1: Map of the southern part of the United Kingdom (a) with exploded section noting the location of Station L4, approximately 10 km south of Plymouth (b)

## 2.2. Physical measurements

Measurements utilising an array of instruments were undertaken on the 22nd September 2010 aboard the *RV Plymouth Quest*, during spring tides. The experiment formed part of a set of surveys detailed in [Cross et al. \(2013\)](#), though much of the method is reproduced here for clarity. All instruments were deployed in a Lagrangian reference frame whilst following a drifter drogued by a holey sock positioned at 3-12 m. Within the drifter-drogue assembly, a 600 kHz Acoustic Doppler Current Profiler (ADCP) was fixed within a neutrally-buoyant submersible at an approximate depth of 20 m. The ADCP sampled at 2 s intervals with a bin size of 0.5 m, with the depth of the first good bin at 21 m. The device was fixed in a downward-looking position and was able to resolve the level of current shear present for the lower part of the water column. The vessel relocated to the drifter each hour, and measurements were obtained whilst the drifter was no further than 100 m from the ship. A free-fall microstructure profiler, the ISW Wassermesstechnik MSS-90, was utilised to observe the turbulent velocity shear. The number of profiles taken during each hour ranged from 6-8. The MSS-90 contains a number of sensors including optical backscatter (OBS), a fluorometer and conductivity, temperature and depth (CTD) probe. The dissipation rate of turbulent kinetic energy was estimated from the small-scale shear and assuming isotropy is defined as:

$$\varepsilon = 7.5\nu\langle(\partial u/\partial z)^2\rangle, \quad (1)$$

where  $\nu$  is the kinematic viscosity, which in seawater takes the value of about  $10^{-6} \text{ m}^2 \text{ s}^{-1}$ , and  $\partial u/\partial z$  represents the spatial derivative of the horizontal current component,  $u$ , in the vertical direction,  $z$ . The angled brackets denote a suitable time average, and the units of turbulent dissipation are given in  $\text{W kg}^{-1}$ . MSS-90 profiles begin at a depth of 5 m, due to the potential for contamination from the motion of the boat induced by wave activity ([Lozovatsky et al., 2006](#)). The MSS-90 samples at a rate of 1024 Hz with a typical fall

123 speed of  $0.5 \text{ m s}^{-1}$ . Such high frequency measurements allow for great confi-  
 124 dence in the estimate of  $\varepsilon$ . Common to the use of these instruments, the error  
 125 associated with each measurement is around  $\pm 50\%$  (Simpson et al., 1996;  
 126 Rippeth and Inall, 2002). It should be noted that with moderate turbulence  
 127 generating values for  $\varepsilon$  of around  $10^{-6} \text{ W kg}^{-1}$ , such as would be observed at  
 128 L4, it is readily shown that the uncertainty with each measurement is low  
 129 (e.g. Prandke 2005).

### 130 2.3. Holographic camera

131 An in-line digital holographic imaging system, the holocam, was also  
 132 deployed. The holocam is mounted on a steel frame along with a CTD, and  
 133 is described fully in Graham and Nimmo Smith (2010). Briefly, the system  
 134 contains a laser light source that illuminates a sample volume containing  
 135 phytoplankton particles which scatter the light, whereupon an interference  
 136 pattern is generated and subsequently recorded by a charge-coupled device  
 137 (CCD). The resulting hologram is then computationally reconstructed post-  
 138 deployment to give in-focus images of every particle in the sample volume,  
 139 allowing for the calculation of particle statistics such as volume concentration  
 140 and size distribution. Each raw hologram has a pixel resolution of  $4.4 \mu\text{m}$ ,  
 141 and is  $1536 \times 1024$  pixels in size, yielding a sample volume of  $1.65 \text{ cm}^3$  which  
 142 is later scaled up to one litre during post-processing. In practical terms the  
 143 minimum particle size resolved by this system is around  $25 \mu\text{m}$ , with the  
 144 maximum size limited only by the size of the CCD, here in excess of 6 mm.  
 145 The holocam was profiled vertically through the water column once each  
 146 hour, near-simultaneously with the MSS profiles. The sampling frequency  
 147 was 5 Hz with a profiling speed typically in the range of  $0.2\text{-}0.4 \text{ m s}^{-1}$ , thus  
 148 samples were obtained at a vertical resolution of around 5-6 cm.

149 The average number of holograms taken during a given profile of the  
 150 instrument is around 1000; however the number of images for a given section  
 151 of the water column may vary with the minor variation in fall speed range  
 152 or water column properties. With the sample volume of each image, the

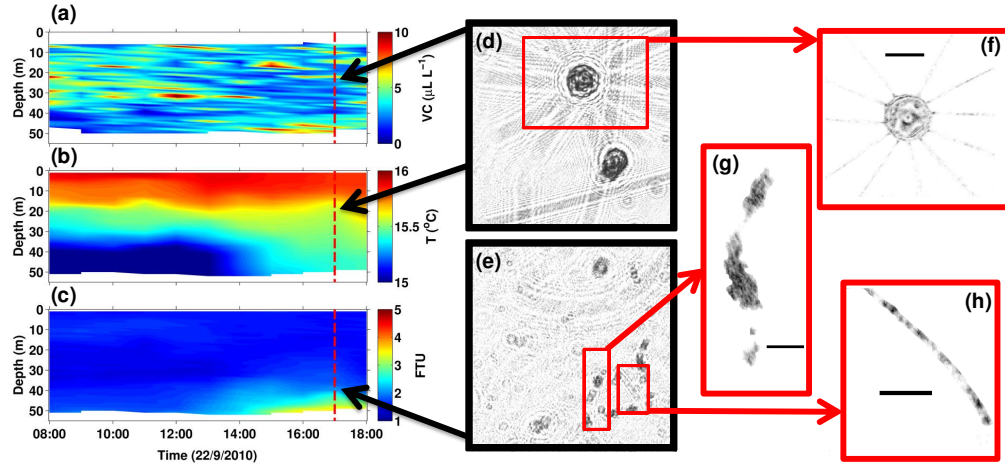


Figure 2: Illustration of the initial particle analysis using signals of interest from the MSS. Part (a) shows the total particle volume concentration (holocam), (b) and (c) the response from the temperature and OBS sensors (MSS). Parts (d) to (h) represent a step-wise view of selecting raw holograms prior to numerical reconstruction in order to establish the type of particle present. The scale bar in (f) is  $200\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ , in (g) and (h)  $100\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ . The dashed vertical line on plots (a), (b) and (c) represents the time of high water.

total volume of water sampled during each profile would be in the region of 1.5-2 L. An illustration of how the holocam is used to assess the particle environment is further displayed in Figure 2. The first step of this analysis is to locate the raw holograms that relate to the area of the water column that is of interest. Regions of interest (ROI) may be defined within each hologram and numerically reconstructed, revealing a sharp and in-focus image of each particle (Figure 2f to h).

An additional technique was employed to determine how phytoplankton may be altered by changes to their physical environment, and also where within a tidal cycle their number is shown to vary. Prior to this work, such enumeration of phytoplankton has not been possible *in situ*. Within the size range of phytoplankton that the holocam may reliably resolve, phytoplankton biomass at L4 is dominated by chain-forming phytoplankton (Widdicombe et al., 2010), whereby within each image a colony of multiple diatom cells is regarded a single suspended particle. Diatom chains are routinely found to grow to several mm in size and are readily identifiable from the image data. However, to maximise efficiency when counting individual colonies, only phytoplankton  $\geq 200 \mu\text{m}$  were identified and recorded. The assumption is made that this threshold would be sufficient to identify changes to the phytoplankton population brought about by enhanced turbulence.

A simple, graphical user interface was designed in Matlab which took both a flattened, reconstructed image of a  $1024 \times 1024$  ROI in addition to the same raw, unreconstructed hologram as inputs. Blocks of images were collated within 5 m intervals. Phytoplankton were first identified as present through simple observation of each image. Upon identification, selection of the phytoplankton was achieved through the click of a computer mouse. The interface stored each click as a single phytoplankter, allowing for the calculation of the mean number of phytoplankton per unit volume of one litre. Throughout this paper, the term number is used to refer to this metric when describing changes to the phytoplankton population.



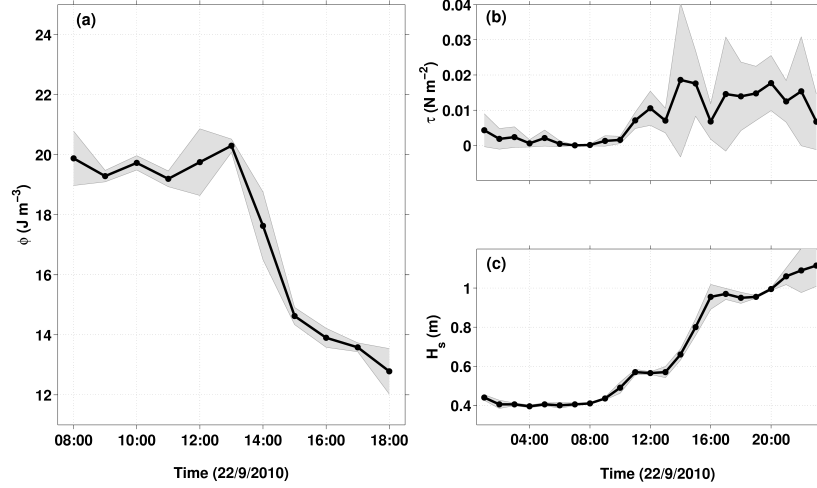


Figure 3: The rapid change in water column energetics brought about by the inclement conditions. In (a), the potential energy anomaly (PEA),  $\phi$ , (b) local wind stress,  $\tau$  and (c) significant wave height,  $H_s$ , from a nearby wave buoy in Looe Bay.

### 3. Results

The duration of the survey was for only 11 hours, as the sampling activity was affected by instrument failure brought about by inclement conditions. Throughout the survey the weather conditions deteriorated which resulted in enhanced mixing from the surface, partially eroding the stratification present. However, these conditions resulted from a relatively moderate increase in wind stress, with values at its peak of  $1.9 \times 10^{-2} \text{ N m}^{-2}$  (Figure 3b).

Wave conditions were assessed by utilising data from the Looe wave buoy, located at  $50.34^\circ \text{ N } 04.41^\circ \text{ W}$ , which is 17 km from L4. The buoy is situated in water with a depth of around 12 m. The average wind direction throughout the period where wind stress increases was from the south at  $180^\circ$ . The buoy records a value for  $H_s$ , the significant wave height, which is taken to be the average wave height of one-third of the highest waves. Coincident with the increase in  $\tau$  is a corresponding increase in  $H_s$ . Whilst the corresponding wave energy generated by each site would differ markedly due to the shallow

depth of the Looe Bay buoy, it is nonetheless indicative of the impact the increased wind activity has on the region.

The potential energy anomaly, (PEA), describes the amount of energy required to bring about a completely mixed water column. [Simpson et al. \(1990\)](#) described the PEA, in units of  $\text{J m}^{-3}$ , as follows:

$$\phi = \frac{1}{H} \int_{-H}^0 (\bar{\rho} - \rho) g z dz \quad (2)$$

here,  $H$  is the water depth,  $\rho$  density,  $g$  acceleration due to gravity with the overbar defining a depth-average. The evolution of  $\phi$  displays the rapid alteration to the structure of the water column (Figure 3a). For the initial six hours of the survey values of  $\phi$  range between  $19.2\text{--}20.3 \text{ J m}^{-3}$  before the marked reduction, to a minimum of  $12.8 \text{ J m}^{-3}$  at hour 11. However, when observing the results from the ADCP, it is not thought that the coincident wind and wave activity is entirely responsible for this rapid change (Figure 4). Due to the position of the ADCP, velocity is available for the lower part of the water column only. The presence of vertical shear is marked, and suggests that there is the potential for the composition of the observed water mass to be readily altered by processes other than vertical mixing. This notion is confirmed by the Progressive Vector Diagram (PVD) which suggests the maximum separation between the middle of the water column and the bottom to be of the order of  $\sim 1 \text{ km}$  (Figure 5). A comparative analysis for the upper layer was not possible due to unreliable GPS data from the drifter.

The maximum value of velocity magnitude,  $U$ , in the lower part of the water column is  $0.39 \text{ m s}^{-1}$  at the around midday, shortly before the start of the increased wind and wave activity. In the latter part of the survey,  $U$  was reduced with values close to  $0.2 \text{ m s}^{-1}$ . The reduced tidal velocity has resulted in lower values of  $\varepsilon$ , with the maximum dissipation of  $10^{-5} \text{ W kg}^{-1}$  here not extending above  $40 \text{ m}$  (Figure 4c). Of particular note was the increased  $\varepsilon$

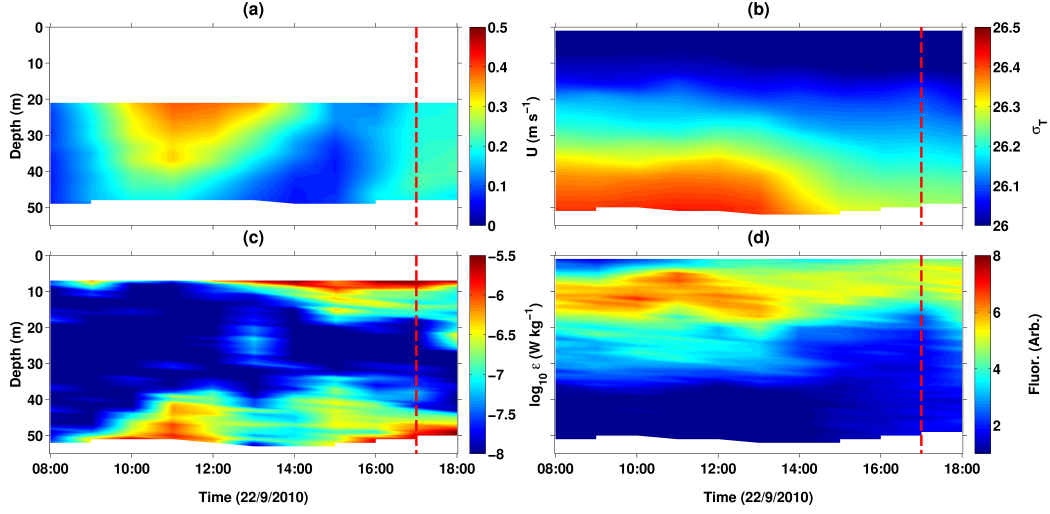


Figure 4: Water column structure and properties. Plot (a) gives velocity magnitude,  $U$ , provided by the ADCP on the drifting float for the lower part of the water column, plot (b) density,  $\sigma_T$ , (c) turbulent dissipation,  $\varepsilon$ , and plot (d) fluorescence in arbitrary units. Plots (b), (c) and (d) are from the MSS observations. The dashed vertical line represents the time of high water.

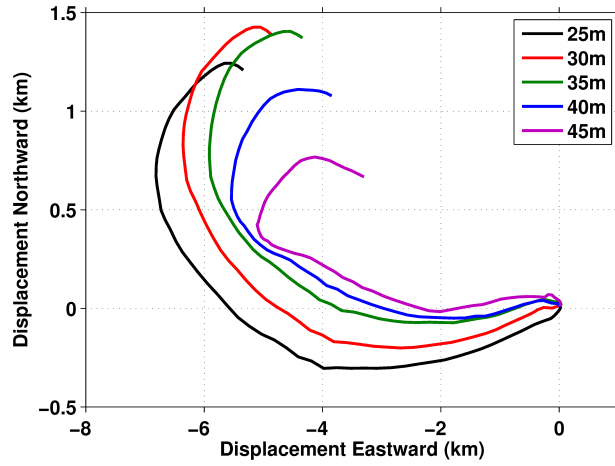


Figure 5: Progressive Vector Diagram for the lower part of the water column covered by the downward-facing ADCP.

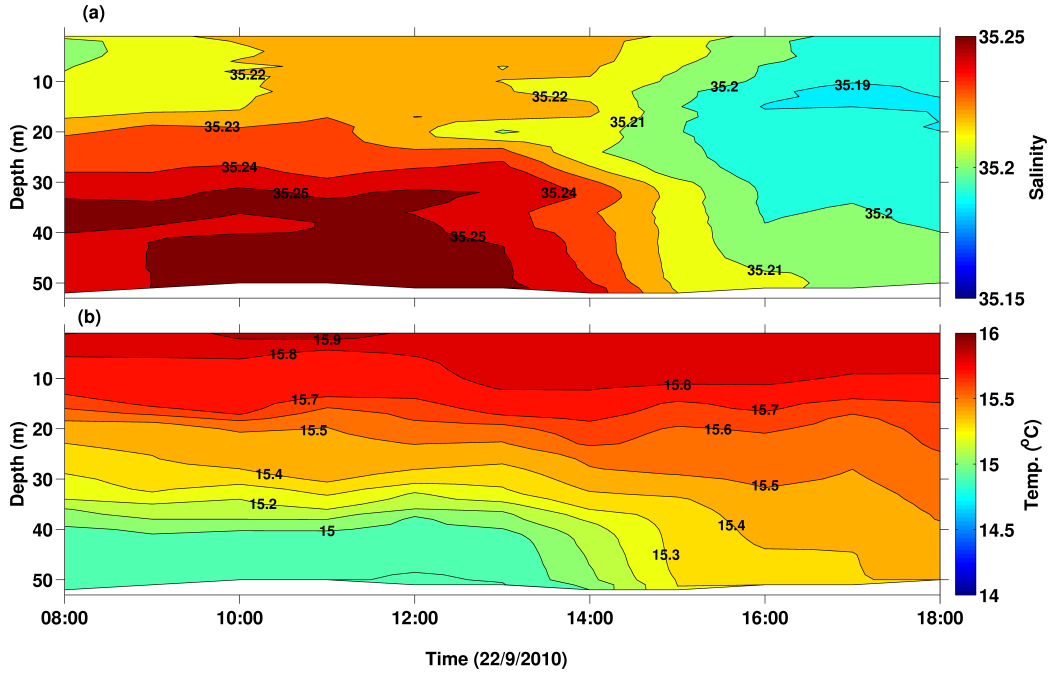


Figure 6: Contoured plots of salinity (a), and temperature (b) for the entire survey.

225 in the upper part of the water column toward the end of the survey. This  
 226 is likely a result of the increased wind and wave energy, where dissipation  
 227 rates of around  $10^{-4} \text{ W kg}^{-1}$  were observed at a depth of 6-7 m. Increased  
 228 mixing from turbulence continued with depth, albeit to a lesser extent, with  
 229 values of  $\varepsilon$  approaching  $10^{-6} \text{ W kg}^{-1}$ , similar to that brought about by tidal  
 230 forcing earlier in the survey. However, this enhanced mixing is not observed  
 231 to extend to depths below 30 m at any point.

232 Further evaluation of the underlying processes that influence water col-  
 233 umn density was undertaken through the analysis of temperature and salinity  
 234 (Figure 6). The influence of both vertical mixing and advection can be seen  
 235 at the two points of interest in the survey. Although exaggerated by scale,  
 236 the water column freshens slightly toward the latter part of the survey, with  
 237 values for  $S$  in the upper layer being reduced by around 0.03. This small  
 238 change is unlikely to be the result of vertical mixing, it is more likely the

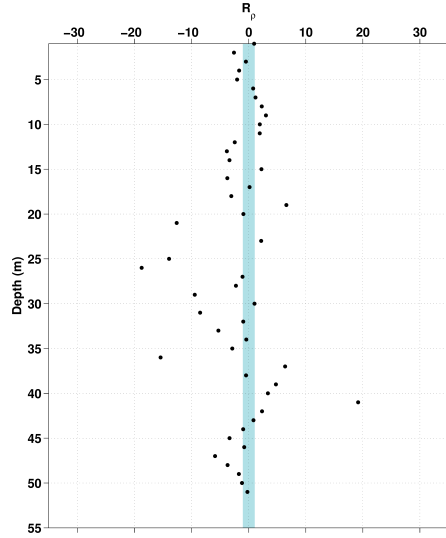


Figure 7: Density ratio for the 16.00 period, the period where vertical mixing in the upper layer is shown to occur. The shaded blue region denotes the -1 to 1 range. Values that fall within this range indicate that density is more strongly influence by salinity, and *vice versa*.

239 result of the interspersing of filaments of fresher water with the Lagrangian  
 240 water mass. Filaments such as these are likely to be encountered at this site  
 241 due to the input from the nearby riverine sources (Smyth et al., 2010). There  
 242 is some indication that the increased input of energy into the upper layer is  
 243 beginning to homogenise temperature. Maximum surface temperatures at  
 244 10.00 are shown to be 15.9°C. This is reduced at the 16.00 point by 0.1°C to  
 245 15.8°C, and the depth at which this value is observed decreases from around  
 246 5 m to 10 m. To establish the relative influence of both temperature and  
 247 salinity on the density of the water column, the density ratio, given as:

$$R_\rho = \frac{\alpha(\Delta T)}{\beta(\Delta S)}, \quad (3)$$

248 (where  $\alpha = \frac{1}{\rho_0} \frac{\partial \rho}{\partial T}$  is the thermal expansion coefficient and  $\beta = \frac{1}{\rho_0} \frac{\partial \rho}{\partial S}$  the  
 249 haline contraction coefficient) was calculated for the point of the survey where  
 250 vertical mixing begins to homogenise temperature (Figure 7). The water



Figure 8: Profiles of Fluorescence (in arbitrary units) for the two selected time periods of prior to the increase in atmospheric forcing and after.

251 column will be most strongly influenced by salinity if the values of  $R_\rho$  fall  
 252 within the -1 to 1 range. Whilst salinity is shown to exert some influence  
 253 over density for this period, overwhelmingly it is shown to be temperature  
 254 that dominates. This is particularly apparent in the upper 25 m of the water  
 255 column, where all but five of the points lie outside of the -1 to 1 range.

256 This analysis is driven by focusing on the signals of interest provided  
 257 by the MSS. Fluorescence responds to the increase in mixing by reducing  
 258 strength in the latter part of the survey (Figure 4d). Looking in more detail  
 259 at the two periods of interest, a quantifiable difference in fluorescence is ob-  
 260 served (Figure 8). Integrating both periods with respect to depth shows that  
 261 the latter period returns a signal that is reduced by around 15%, as the parti-  
 262 cles that contribute to the total begin to be affected by the conditions. Using  
 263 the technique of counting the population of large phytoplankton particles, it  
 264 was possible to see if this change was reflected in the number identified.  
 265 For the earlier period, the number of phytoplankton is markedly above that

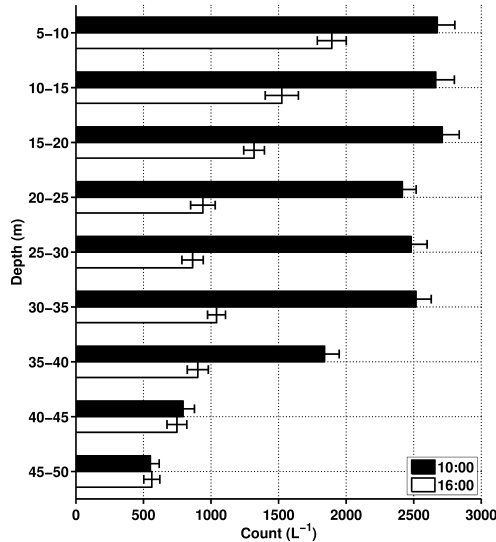


Figure 9: Phytoplankton counts before and during the enhanced period of surface mixing. The two selected time periods are as illustrated.

266 which is observed in the later part of the survey. Many of the depth intervals  
 267 above 35-40 m contain counts of phytoplankton above  $2500 \text{ L}^{-1}$ , correspond-  
 268 ing to the large patch of fluorescence. The later period, shown as the white  
 269 bars of Figure 9, broadly follows the same pattern in that the largest values  
 270 are observed closer to the surface before reducing markedly with increasing  
 271 depth. Only the uppermost two depth intervals contain values greater than  
 272  $1500 \text{ L}^{-1}$ , however, as the impact of the increased mixing begins to alter the  
 273 phytoplankton population. The depth-averaged value for 16.00 is slightly  
 274 more than  $1000 \text{ L}^{-1}$ , almost half of that at 10.00. Differences are also ob-  
 275 served in the particle size distribution (PSD), where for the earlier period  
 276 the holocam measures a greater number of large particles and fewer smaller  
 277 particles (Figure 10). This situation is reversed for the later period.

278 These differences appear despite the total particle volume concentration  
 279 remaining similar throughout the survey. This is highlighted by Figure 2a,  
 280 and shown in more detail by the depth profiles of Figure 11. This indicates

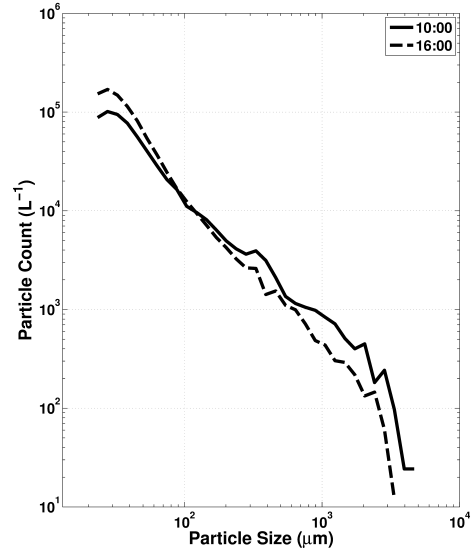


Figure 10: The particle size distributions for both 10.00 and 16.00.

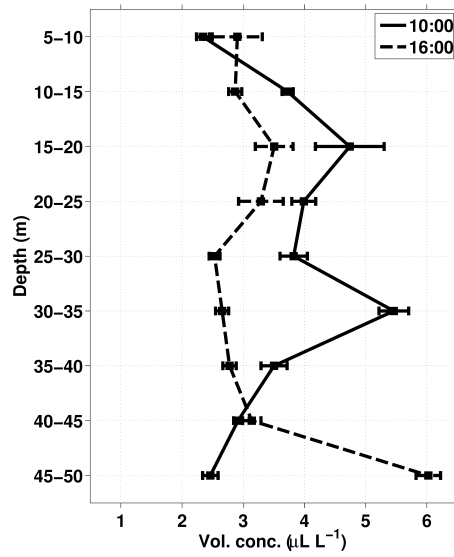


Figure 11: Total particle volume concentration from the holocam for the contrasting periods of the tidal survey, as labelled.



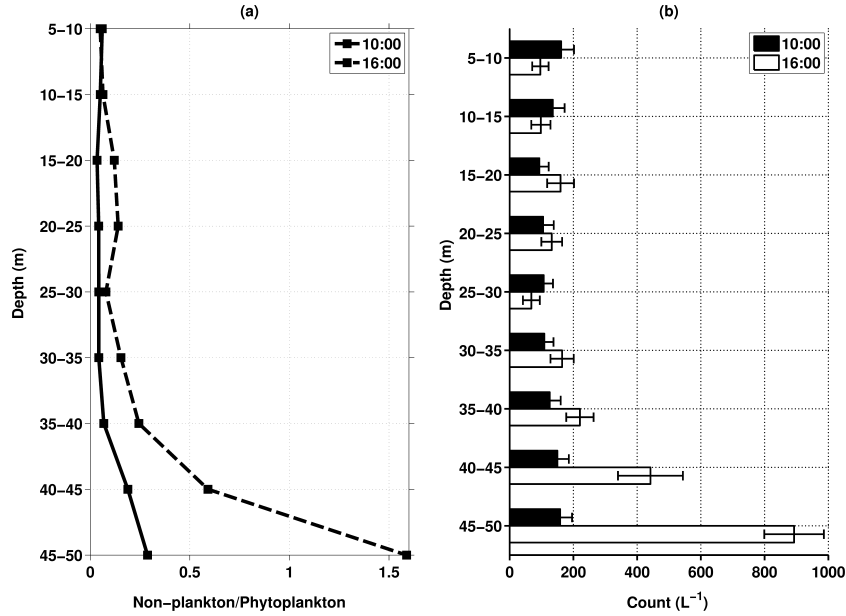


Figure 12: Plot (a) displays the ratio of the number of phytoplankton to non-planktonic particles, where values  $< 1$  indicate a dominance of phytoplankton particles. Plot (b) gives the number of non-planktonic particles (flocs, mineral grains etc.)  $> 200 \mu\text{m}$ .

that, as broadly the same amount of material is present both before and after the increase in atmospheric forcing, an explanation for the marked difference between the counts of phytoplankton is required. The PSD is suggesting that a greater number of smaller particles exist at 16.00, indicating that the large diatoms that dominate the suspended particle population of L4 are possibly being reduced in size by the increase in turbulence, below the threshold of manual identification.

The image analysis further allows the identification of multiple particles of various types. A separate exercise was conducted to determine the number of large particles from the non-planktonic fraction, that is those that comprise flocs, or aggregations of pieces of biological matter and mineral-type grains or clays. This enabled the calculation of the ratio of non-plankton to phytoplankton particles to be assessed (Figure 12a). In calculating this ratio, where values  $< 1$  indicate a dominance of phytoplankton, for the later

295 part of the survey values of the ratio were higher suggesting the increased  
296 presence of non-plankton particles. However, it is noted that the increase is  
297 largely restricted to the lower part of the water column and most probably  
298 linked to resuspension of material from the bed (Figure 12b). In the upper  
299 part, there are only two intervals where a larger number of non-planktonic  
300 particles are observed for the 16:00 time point.

#### 301 4. Discussion and Conclusions

302 The onset of poor weather gave an opportunity to assess the response  
303 of the phytoplankton to enhanced turbulence from the surface. The plot of  
304 fluorescence (Figure 4d) reinforces the impact of the increased mixing, and  
305 appears to have been immediately altered. Within the upper layer, com-  
306 mensurate with the partial erosion of the thermocline is the dispersal of the  
307 fluorescence signature which at 10:00 was at its strongest at the base of the  
308 density interface. However, the increased turbulence brought about by the  
309 atmospheric conditions does not penetrate the entire water column. Given  
310 the presence of vertical shear (Figure 4a), it is apparent that the water column  
311 could be considered as existing as two layers, with only the upper  $\sim 25$  m re-  
312 maining part of the Lagrangian experiment. It is likely that the rapid change  
313 to the structure of the water column and subsequent alteration to the phy-  
314 toplankton population has been brought about by the combined action of  
315 advection in the lower layer, and mixing from the enhanced turbulence in  
316 the upper.

317 That the upper layer undergoes such rapid change in response to the  
318 coincident increase in wind and wave activity has been previously reported  
319 during a recent study by [Sutherland et al. \(2013\)](#). Enhanced mixing was  
320 observed to erode stratification shortly after an observed increase to the wind  
321 speed, with little lag before the expected increase to the level of turbulence  
322 was recorded. A similar pattern in the temperature signal is observed here,  
323 albeit on much reduced scales. Further, whilst the salinity signal is suggestive

324 of advection also playing a role in the upper layer, the observed change is  
325 very small. The maximum surface to bottom salinity gradient is only 0.03 at  
326 any point in the survey. [Smyth et al. \(2010\)](#) suggest that filaments of fresher  
327 water can readily enter into a sampled frame of reference as a result of the  
328 proximity of L4 to riverine sources. However, when this occurs salinity values  
329 are often reduced by up to 1 in the upper 25 m, a difference of two orders  
330 of magnitude over what is observed here. As temperature is also shown to  
331 dominate at the 16.00 time point (Figure 7), it is likely the assumption that  
332 these observations are made within a single water mass for the upper layer  
333 is sound.

334 As with the fluorescence signal, the phytoplankton population during  
335 the earlier part of the survey is dispersed, encompassing a wider range  
336 of depth intervals and decreasing the number of large phytoplankton ob-  
337 served overall. Periodic erosion of the thermocline similar to that reported  
338 here has been observed across tidal cycles previously, albeit with respect to  
339 the enhanced tidally-induced turbulence displacing the thermocline upwards  
340 ([Sharples, 2008](#)). However, few if any studies have captured the partial ero-  
341 sion of stratification during a tidal cycle and also been able to comment on  
342 the subsequent dispersal of the resident phytoplankton in response.

343 The distribution of phytoplankton has been substantially altered between  
344 the two periods, so much so that the depth averaged values for the later period  
345 are almost halved. We suggest that there are three main reasons for this  
346 change. The reduction in the length of diatom chains below the identification  
347 threshold of  $200\mu\text{m}$  in response to the enhanced turbulence in the upper  
348 layer is seen to occur. Though in the absence of data quantifying the average  
349 lengths of diatom chains before and after the increased mixing, it is accepted  
350 that this interpretation may be open to question. However, the reduction  
351 displayed by the PSD for the larger particle size fraction is indicative that  
352 this is accurate (Figure 10). Further, the PSD is generated by reference to  
353 the major axis length (MAL) of a given particle. Consistently throughout

354 this survey, diatoms were the dominant particle present within each image.  
355 Therefore, the PSD returned by the holocam is heavily influenced by the long,  
356 chain-forming phytoplankton at sizes above the  $200\mu\text{m}$  threshold, offering  
357 additional support to the notion that chain breakage is a key mechanism for  
358 reducing the count. Whilst chain breakage might not be considered dispersal  
359 as such, to our knowledge this coincident response to turbulent mixing from  
360 a phytoplankton population has not been previously observed *in situ*.

361 The potential for phytoplankton to be advected away from the sampled  
362 water mass is an additional means by which the counts might be reduced. It is  
363 well accepted that there exists a negative relationship between fluorescence  
364 and increased turbulence (e.g. [Mitchell et al., 2008](#); [Prairie et al., 2011](#)).  
365 Typically, in the presence of turbulence, phytoplankton tend to sink more  
366 rapidly, as recently demonstrated by [Macias et al. \(2013\)](#). If advection is  
367 playing a prominent role at this time, then systematic removal from the upper  
368 to lower layer may be occurring, with the sheared flow acting to disperse the  
369 population out of the sampled reference frame. This is potentially supported  
370 by the increase in fluorescence toward the bed at the 16:00 point (Figure 8),  
371 but also in the upper layer as presumably the higher values for fluorescence  
372 at the earlier time point need to be balanced elsewhere.

373 There is also a contribution to the reduction in the counts resulting from  
374 turbulence aggregating the particles, altering their classification under our  
375 scheme from phytoplankton to a non-plankton particle. The advantage of us-  
376 ing the holocam is that it allows for the *in situ* analysis of particles that other  
377 methods are unable to provide, including water sampling. If it is accurate  
378 that turbulence is increasing the potential for aggregation, then the images  
379 must contain evidence that this is happening. This is indeed the case, as is  
380 demonstrated by Figure 13, where the examples within this image are taken  
381 from both the upper and lower layers of the water column. Clearly, given the  
382 amount of material present in the lower layer, aggregation is more likely to  
383 be promoted here. This was also the case toward the bed for the earlier part

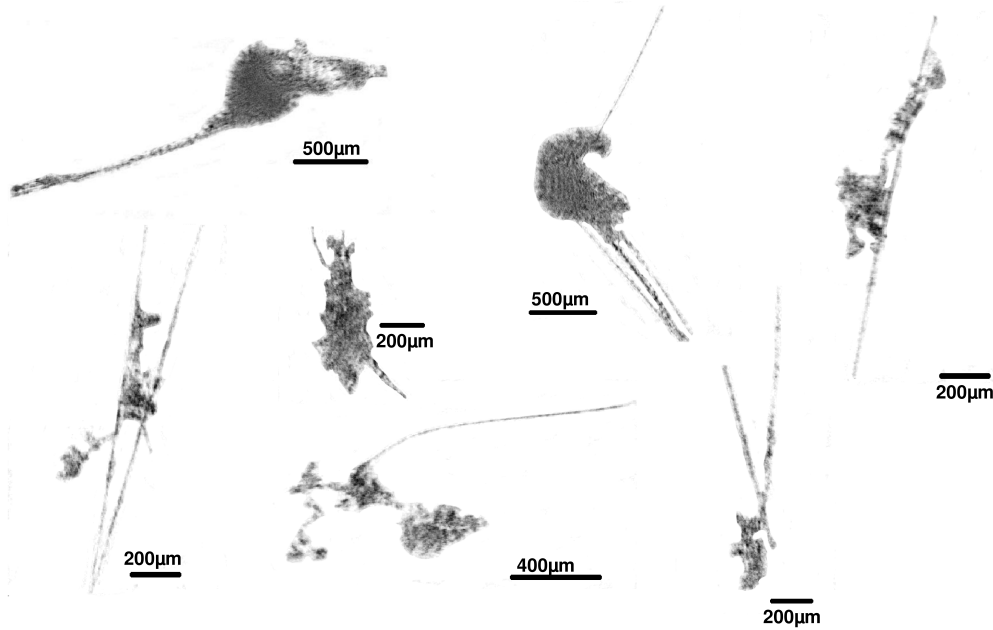


Figure 13: Montage illustrating the large number of diatom chains that have changed ‘classification’ from a phytoplankton to non-plankton particle under the scheme used throughout this work. The scale bars for each particle are as labelled.

of the survey where aggregation of particles similar to these examples also occurs. For all cases where aggregation is observed (i.e. toward the bed at 10:00 and in both the upper and lower layers at 16:00), it is during elevated levels of  $\varepsilon$  of around  $10^{-6} \text{ W kg}^{-1}$  and above.

The potential for turbulence to break up suspended marine particles is well understood (Hill, 1998; Manning and Dyer, 1999; Jago et al., 2006). However, it is less certain as to the strength of turbulence necessary to cause chain-forming phytoplankton to undergo breakage. The level of turbulence observed during the latter part of the survey, whilst higher in the upper 10 m of the water column, is comparable to laboratory studies that have examined the response of phytoplankton to increased mixing (e.g. Peters and Gross, 1994; Romero et al., 2012). The PSD for this diatom-dominated environment does indicate that a change in size has occurred, though supporting evidence

397 in the literature is scarce. In a recent investigation into the size structure of  
398 phytoplankton communities exposed to varying levels of turbulence, [Cozar](#)  
399 [and Echevarria \(2005\)](#) demonstrated that colonies of the chain-forming *Skele-*  
400 *tonema costatum* do undergo breakage when turbulence is enhanced to levels  
401 matching that seen in the upper water column. It is this species of diatom  
402 that dominates the phytoplankton biomass at L4 within the size range that  
403 the holocam is able to resolve ([Widdicombe et al., 2010](#)). Lab-based exper-  
404 iments do not tend to report the destruction of phytoplankton chains when  
405 the level of turbulent dissipation is of the order of  $10^{-6} \text{ W kg}^{-1}$  ([Peters et al.,](#)  
406 [2002](#); [Arin et al., 2002](#)), which is the highest value observed below 10 m at  
407 the 16:00 time point.

408 There remains some difficulty in translating studies in the lab to the field,  
409 particularly with respect to phytoplankton and turbulence ([Thornton, 2002](#)).  
410 Rarely do two different mechanisms for generating mechanically-induced tur-  
411 bulence conform to the same standard, and rarer still are the studies that  
412 induce comparable turbulent intensities ([Drapeau et al., 1994](#)). Methods for  
413 conducting experiments in the lab with phytoplankton and turbulence have  
414 changed little over the previous 20 years, and it is unclear how well these  
415 studies approximate field conditions. In light of this, the results presented  
416 here suggest that moderate levels of turbulence are perhaps capable of im-  
417 pacting on the size of diatom chains, though clearly further work will be  
418 needed to confirm if this is accurate.

419 The reduction in number of phytoplankton is also a function of how they  
420 are classified throughout this work. The increased frequency with which  
421 diatoms collide with other particles and form flocs has contributed to this  
422 decline, and according to our scheme would no longer be considered phy-  
423 toplankton particles having done so. Diatoms will readily aggregate, typi-  
424 cally in response to increased mixing where contact with other material in  
425 the water column can habitually occur ([Kranck and Milligan, 1988](#); [Kiorboe](#)  
426 [et al., 1994](#); [Burd and Jackson, 2009](#)). The images from the latter part of

the survey support this, indicating that there is a balance between particle break-up which is reducing size, and an enhanced rate of collision which is contributing to a change in particle composition. Such detail on the fate of phytoplankton subjected to turbulence has not been previously observed *in situ*. That this is also occurring at relatively moderate levels of turbulence is perhaps surprising, suggesting there is a need for greater effort to reconcile laboratory experiments with field data. Further work utilising the relatively new method of holographic imaging will undoubtedly help in this, as the need for reliable information on the impact of short-term mixing events on phytoplankton communities becomes increasingly important for accurate numerical simulations and ecosystem modeling.

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